Offloading MREs for relief from Hurricane Marilyn.

DOD (SRA Tana R. Hamilton)

# JOINTNESS Begins at Home—

# Responding to Domestic Incidents

*By* ALAN L. BROWN

Floods in the Midwest, hurricanes in Florida, and oil spills along the coast of Rhode Island are recent catastrophic natural phenomena which have made headline news. And each has involved responses by the Armed Forces, who are increasingly being asked to operate in domestic contingencies. This involves working alongside governmental agencies, nongovernmental organizations, and other private groups. While most joint operations are conducted beyond our national borders, we must not forget that jointness begins at home.

## The Home Front

With the Cold War over, there is a growing realization that national security is underpinned by more than military strength and is influenced by factors other than warfare. It can suffer when the economy is disrupted, social fabric is strained, or the international environment is threatened. Absent a superpower threat, the Armed Forces have turned to other roles, and with mixed results have participated in peace operations, drug interdiction, and disaster relief. This has sometimes led to activities within our own borders. Yet little attention has been given to the unique roles the military can play in domestic security threats or the demands confronting joint forces in this arena. "Military support for national goals short of war," as it is termed in Joint Pub 1, *Joint Warfare of the Armed Forces of the United States*, requires the application of skills other than warfighting and coordination with a wide range of domestic agencies.

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The National Defense Panel recommended that the Armed Forces increase their attention to defense of the homeland. Response to terrorist attacks, especially those employing either chemical or biological agents, was highlighted as an emerging requirement. Limited attacks from smaller nations or transnational groups were cited as a growing threat. The panel also urged the Pentagon to refocus the role of the National Guard and make response to domestic crises its major mission. These recommendations illustrate the increasing pressure on the military to assume domestic roles.

In conducting operations at home, different services predominate for varied reasons. These undertakings bring to the fore the "three guards": the Army National Guard, Air National Guard, and Coast Guard. The Army National Guard and Air National Guard occupy a key role because of their link to state governments and because governors can call them up in emergencies. The Coast Guard is vital because of its regulatory powers. With authority similar to that held by governors, the Secretary of Transportation can call up Coast Guard Reservists in a domestic crisis. This is an arena in which local knowledge and community ties have high utility.

Domestic operations are numerous and varied. They include responses to natural disasters (hurricanes, storms, floods, earthquakes, and fires) and man-made disasters (oil spills, hazardous material releases, and explosions). Law enforcement reaction to problems such as rioting and acts of terrorism is also a factor, although the use of combat forces, like the Los Angeles riots of 1991, should be the exception and not the rule.

The Armed Forces can fill a variety of roles in domestic emergencies. Installations and bases can be used as staging areas. The military can provide ground, sea, and air transport as well as everything from construction equipment to platforms for airborne observations. Portable sources of communications, medical treatment, food, and shelter are all available in the inventory. Military personnel also can offer security and a flexible supply of skilled labor. While prevention of domestic terrorism is primarily the responsibility of the Federal Bureau of Investigation, most responses to terrorist incidents will involve many organizations, including the Armed Forces.

Some argue that noncombat operations sap the power of the military by diverting strength from warfighting. Yet the application of combat power is the business end of military institutions,

**Flooding on the Red River in North Dakota.**

1st Combat Camera Squadron (Paul R. Caron)

**Aftermath of Hurricane Andrew.**


DOD (James Ferguson)

the culmination of a range of logistical and support assets. Often considered the "sinews of war," these capabilities are exercised and strengthened by involvement in domestic emergencies. Units that provide them can practice such wartime skills as marshaling and controlling forces in the field, providing transportation, assisting in construction, and furnishing logistic support.

**the organization for joint operations has evolved into a body with a single commander and six subordinate elements**

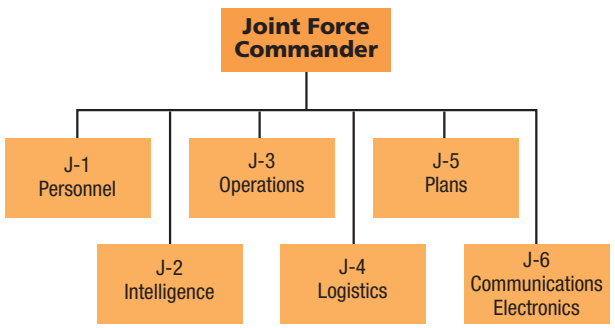
### Another Chain of Command

A sound command structure is critical in every operation. Without effective and informed decisionmaking, a strong chain of command, and reliable communications, any force runs the risk of disaster. This concern for command and control has led to much change. Cooperation among the services has grown less controversial because of the growing emphasis on jointness, legislative action, and success in the Persian Gulf War. Debate is focused on details, not on the basic concept of jointness.

The Armed Forces command staff organization for joint operations developed during the last century, has evolved into a body with a single commander and six subordinate elements (see standard joint staff organization below.)

However, while this organization is commonly used by the Armed Forces and many allied militaries, it is not the only structure that operational commanders are likely to encounter. Modern warfare is often coalition warfare. Commanders may find that partners use different organizational concepts and may thus must be adaptive. Going beyond the standard staff organization, however, is not necessarily a problem. The organization should serve the commander, not the reverse.

**Figure 1. Standard Joint Staff Organization**




Domestic operations are rarely exclusively military ventures. Participation by other agencies complicates command relationships even more than coalition operations. With Federal, state, and local governments and private sector organizations involved, homeland operations come with many overlapping jurisdictions and roles. Thus the joint staff organization, although proven in military operations, has its limitations. While it effectively coordinates service roles, it ends there, leaving commanders to build relationships and communications with other actors on a piecemeal basis.

However a standard model for managing domestic events known as the incident command system (ICS) is gaining acceptance. Developed during the 1970s to coordinate firefighting in California, it has been adapted to a wide range of contingencies. It is specifically designed as an ad hoc approach which is built in modular fashion so that responders can create large or small organizations. It is also intended to flex and reorganize during a crisis to meet emerging needs. ICS has been used for fires, floods, earthquakes, hurricanes, riots, hazardous material releases, and oil spills (see basic organization in figure 2).

This system, with its unified staff structure, should be familiar to those experienced in a Joint Staff environment. Disaster response has much in common with warfighting; thus it is not surprising that the designers of ICS copied elements of standard military organization. Operations, planning, and logistics sections are all familiar to the military mind, as are many of the subordinate elements such as air operations, demobilization, and communications. The ICS organization also has provisions for multijurisdictional incidents (which occur often in the domestic environment) through a unified command concept. In a unified command, the incident commander role is shared by representatives of each organization with jurisdiction over a incident. Although this leadership by committee might seem to threaten unity of command, it is actually quite workable because of the cohesiveness provided by a common and immediate threat.

The incident command system provides a single focal point for dealing with the press and political officials. This is vital since domestic operations take place under intense political scrutiny. One might even view these players as the domestic analog of hostile forces. But the prudent leader realizes that they can contribute to success as well as failure and manages public information and political liaison accordingly. The press assumes a vital role in passing useful information to the public, and local politicians often play an important part in coordinating the response.

One facet of ICS not frequently seen in military operations is the building of consensus when organizations are formed, especially unified commands. Military organizations have clear chains of command and rely on hierarchical decision-making. The ICS model deliberately mixes all parties; thus at the outset it might be unclear who should lead, and in what role. With overlapping jurisdictions and responsibilities, there are many right answers to any question. The most difficult decision is how to fill the incident commander role. A major advantage of the ICS organization is that it compels responders to make that decision, then work together under that command. Thus disasters need not be faced without central control or unity of effort.

**the Coast Guard has adopted ICS as its standard response system for nonmilitary incident management**

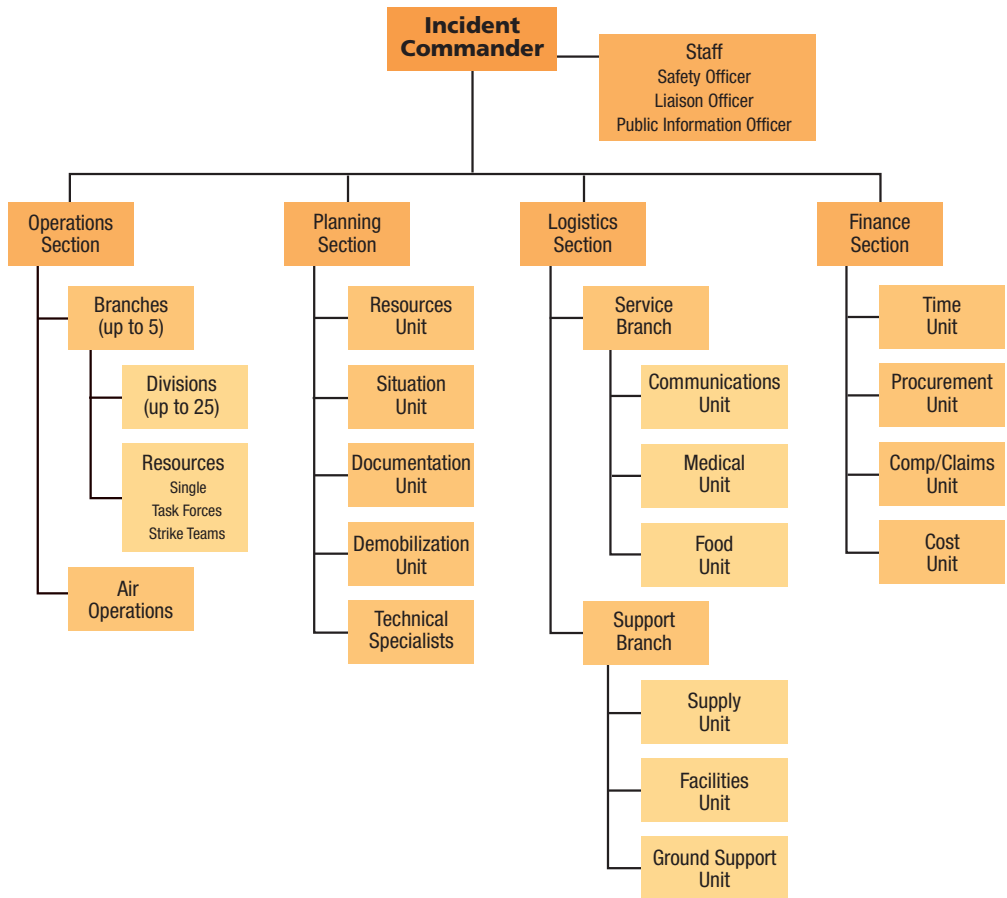
The Coast Guard has adopted ICS as its standard response system for nonmilitary incident management. Commandant Instruction 16471.2 outlines the Coast Guard approach for training and qualifying personnel under the ICS implementation plan. While it was originally favored only within the marine safety program, ICS has now gained support throughout the organization.

Commanders involved in a domestic incident might find themselves providing much of the staff and field force or performing a supporting role, dealing with elements of an ICS staff. The system is widely used in the civilian sector, so participants in the operation can quickly establish roles and responsibilities. Elements of the Armed Forces that might be involved in such operations should become familiar with the concept and practice it in exercises. They should communicate frequently in order to know what forces and capabilities are available locally. Thus they can act more effectively as a joint force when called upon.

## Anatomy of Two Joint Operations

A comparison of domestic incidents illustrates the challenges that confront joint forces

**Figure 2. Basic Incident Command System Organization**




Simulated chemical attack near the Pentagon.

American Forces Information Service (Renné Stiter)

Attacking mock terrorists during tactical maneuver demonstration.

2d Marine Division (Timothy A. Pope)

and the value of ICS in organizing the response. Both events involved oil spills resulting from vessel groundings; the tank vessel *World Prodigy* in June 1989 and the tank barge *North Cape* in January 1996. Each was the largest spill in the history of Rhode Island when it occurred. In both a Coast Guard officer, the captain of the port, led the response. Each involved a multitude of military and civilian organizations. The first grounding occurred before ICS was in use for oil spill response. In the second the command post utilized the system.

As could be expected, the first response to the grounding of *World Prodigy* was conducted by the Coast Guard. A command post was established at the Coast Guard station at Castle Hill. The spiller proved unresponsive, and the captain of the port quickly "federalized" the spill, taking over the response. Among the first organizations involved was the Naval Education and Training Center. Yard patrol boats loaded with oil containment booms were sent to the scene. The center was also used as a staging area. The incident occurred at the height of tourist season, and roads were soon clogged by the curious. The Army National Guard closed off approaches to the Coast Guard station and provided logistic support while the Air National Guard furnished helicopters.

The command post was made up of a confusing collection of personnel, all with their own agendas. While most key players knew each other and interacted effectively, it was difficult for newcomers to orient themselves. The captain of the port considered implementing the Commander Coast Guard Forces organization, an integral part of mobilization planning at the time. But, feeling that it was too restrictive and cumbersome and did not address the problem of liaison with other agencies, he opted instead to build an ad hoc staff more tailored to immediate needs.

While the *North Cape* spill was similar in many respects, the response was different. The captain of the port again moved to the local Coast Guard station, in this case at Point Judith. But that proved inadequate. The Rhode Island emergency management agency contracted for the use of a local hotel both as a command post and a staging area. At the time of the *World Prodigy* spill, during the tail end of the Cold War, the agency took a limited role in domestic emergencies, feeling its greatest role was civil defense. During the *North Cape* spill the opposite was true. After the Coast Guard, it played one of the largest parts in coordinating the response. The Coast Guard and the state government had agreed to use ICS in an environmental disaster, and a command post was quickly formed along those lines. The agency issued reflective vests with ICS titles on the front and back, reducing confusion about positions. The operations vest went to a Coast Guard officer and the logistics vest to an agency employee.

In the *North Cape* incident the spiller cooperated with the Coast Guard, took responsibility, and began to hire response assets. Representatives of the spiller and contractors were folded into the ICS staff, in contrast to the adversarial relationship in the *World Prodigy* spill. Only official personnel conducting the legal investigation were separated from this cooperative approach.

As the scene unfolded, the next major ICS post filled was that of planning head. This task was also assumed by a state employee, who knew little about oil spills but was trained in the ICS concept. Throughout the event, this individual acted as a conscience for the incident commander, planning for the next step as other personnel attended to more pressing issues. Planners focused on documentation, scheduled meetings, and stressed cooperation and integration.

The fourth major ICS post, finance, was filled by a Coast Guard warrant officer from the National Strike Team. Other elements included public information and communications functions, peopled by Coast Guard personnel, and a food unit, provided by Red Cross volunteers. Security was furnished by local police. National Guard support, though limited, was part of the response. The Naval Education and Training Center once more proved a valuable staging area for salvage and oil recovery vessels. Its staff provided support and its piers were used as a storm shelter for the salvaged barge after it was refloated.

## Cooperative Effort

The *North Cape* command post had its share of confusion, especially in the first day after the ship was grounded. Yet it was organized more quickly than the *World Prodigy* command post, largely because of the ICS concept. Despite their diverse nature, there was more cooperation between the organizations which responded quickly to the emergency. Duplication of effort and parallel logistics operations were reduced. Unlike the *World Prodigy* spill where nearly every organization had its own logistics tail, logistics had become a cooperative effort. Although communications equipment and services were limited during the first couple of days, organizations such as the Federal Emergency Management Agency supplied a surplus capability. The command post did not stick strictly to the ICS model, but in the spirit of flexibility evolved in a manner comfortable to all participants. There was some clustering of people by organization, but it did not hamper the team effort of the command post.

The similarities of these two operations show the character of a typical domestic incident. It occurs with little or no notice. It often involves response and joint action from multiple military services. Even when commanders lead the response, a range of civil and local agencies can and should be involved. A command post convenient to the operating area is often built from scratch. Cooperation and consensus are imperative. And since forces are diverse, communications is vital to command and control. Press relations and public information are principal responsibilities of the command staff. And importantly, the differences between the operations show the utility of the ICS system in improving effectiveness.

Involvement in domestic incidents is a critical role for the Armed Forces. Their capabilities make the difference between success and failure. Moreover, their participation reminds the public that they are a positive force in ensuring safety and security. They exercise logistical and support capabilities, the "sinews of war." They bring new challenges to commanders, requiring skills such as team building and consensus. But through the flexible use of organizational concepts such as the incident command system, these challenges can be overcome.

The staff concept used in joint operations is not the only command and control system available to the military. The ICS concept should be encouraged and tested. Because jointness begins at home, the type of operations conducted overseas should also be practiced at home. **JFQ**